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Fall 2-23-2021

## THA 2258-001: Script Analysis

Christopher Wixson

*Eastern Illinois University*

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### Recommended Citation

Wixson, Christopher, "THA 2258-001: Script Analysis" (2021). *Fall 2020*. 100.

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# Theatre 2258: Script Analysis

fall 2020 / Section 001 / 3.00 Credits

Dr. Chris Wixson



## syllabus course philosophy

The purpose of this course is twofold. One, we are going to read some plays together because part of being a theatre professional as well as a cultured individual is having a familiarity with the work of important playwrights. Two, according to the Eastern Illinois University course catalogue, Theatre Arts 2258 will also provide opportunities "to analyze playscripts in terms of and in preparation for performance and production, regardless of theatrical specialization." Together, we will study "basic concepts and terminology associated with dramatic literature, examine several genres and their traits, and discover means of presenting the playwrights' ideas on the stage." THA 2258 dovetails with other Theatre Arts courses in helping you to develop your *craft* as well as cultivate your understanding of theatre as an art form.

**THA 2258 is a reading-intensive course** with a schedule that requires time and attention devoted to our scripts. The most talented and consistently interesting theatre practitioners are avid readers; careful, critical, and meaningful reading is as *vital and necessary* a skill as any in the theatre. Hence, THA2258 is a required core course in the major.

**THA 2258 is also writing-intensive course**, designed to improve skills in critical thinking and analytical expression in order to enable you to meet the challenges of future academic tasks and enhance your proficiency in communication.

Success in this course hinges upon your commitment to self-directed work, **not just** reading the textbooks/our plays in preparation for our sessions together but diligently working on your individual project.

## Learning Goals

This course will provide opportunities

1. To analyze plays in terms of and in preparation for production and performance;
2. For understanding basic concepts and terminology associated with dramatic literature;
3. To broaden knowledge of dramatic literature through reading, writing, and class discussion of plays from different periods and genres;
4. To enhance skills of critical thinking and interpretive analysis.

## course texts

*Backwards and Forwards*, David Ball

*Ashes to Ashes*, Harold Pinter

*The Piano Lesson*, August Wilson

*The Little Foxes*, Lillian Hellman

*Hang*, debbie tucker green

*The Wolves*, Sarah DeLappe

Shorts by Samuel Beckett, Susan Glaspell, Eugene Ionesco, and Suzan-Lori Parks (D2L)

*Script Analysis for Actors, Directors, and Designers*, James Thomas

## contact information

Dr. Chris Wixson

cmwixson@eiu.edu

## office hours

DFAC 1351

TR 8:00-10:30 AM, W 12-1 PM, and by appointment

**\*\*If you are on campus, the above are my face-to-face office hours. Please let me know you are coming in advance; in accordance with IBHE and public health directives, masking is REQUIRED, and the office space will be properly socially-distanced.**

If you are not on campus or would prefer to meet virtually via Zoom for whatever reason, let me know, and we can make arrangements to do so, including finding a mutually convenient time. Email too can be a good and safe way to get questions answered, feedback on your writing, and guidance during the process of assignments.

## COVID-19 practices & expectations

In accordance with IBHE directives, the university is urging all of us to take precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19, including wearing face coverings and physical distancing when we are in class together, walking around campus, in the library, and participating in office hours. Remember that the purpose of both is **to protect others as well as ourselves** and reduce the spread of the virus in our campus and local community as much as possible. EIU's policy is intended to protect **all of us** on campus, as well as the community, your roommates, and loved ones at home.

Additionally, students are expected to not attend class if they are ill and to consult the student health clinic if they have any COVID-19 like symptoms. Needless to say, EIU's COVID-19 campus practices -- including face coverings, avoiding campus if sick, sanitizing surfaces, social distancing, and hand washing -- are all based on the best available public health guidance. If you have a health condition that prevents you from wearing a mask, please contact Student Disability Services. If you are unable to follow EIU's COVID-19 guidelines, you will be asked to leave class as compliance with public health guidance is essential. Accommodations for instruction and make-up work will be made for students with documented medical absences according to IGP #43.

As a faculty member, I am responsible for maintaining an environment in which these practices are observed. **However, this responsibility belongs to all of us. Remember that these practices protect not just ourselves but one another. Making the choice to disregard them potentially puts others —all of us— at greater risk.**

## assignments

- \*Short Analysis Papers — three opportunities to demonstrate what you have learned in 3-4 page papers (Action Analysis, Given Circumstances, Character Analysis) for which revision is allowed
- \*Mini-Analyses – Focused tasks with *four* of our class plays
- \*Active, Engaged Class Participation — defined as WORKING and TALKING productively.
- \*Formalist Analysis –a complete formal analysis covering all elements of your selected play, at least 10 pages in length
- \*Attendance at the Theatre Department's Theatrical Intimacy Education (Online September 12 from 1-6)
- \*A Final Exam Formalist Analysis of *Ashes to Ashes*

## final grades

Your final grade in the course will be determined by your performance on the following assignments:

Analysis Papers (each 3-4 pages in length)	30%
Mini-Analyses ("Trifles", Neutral Dialogue, <i>The Wolves</i> , <i>Closer</i> )	20%
<i>Ashes to Ashes</i> Project (Final) / TIE Workshop Attendance	20%
Formalist Analysis (10-12 pages in length)	30%

**\*\*You must complete all assignments to complete the course. Failure to complete any one of the components represents incomplete work for the semester and anyone with incomplete work will not receive a passing grade for the course.**

## attendance

I expect you to be in class awake and prepared every Tuesday and Thursday morning, wearing masks and observing physical distancing rules. In other words, arrive on time with your reading/writing assignment completed, prepared to participate in workshop and discussion. These sessions are "labs" that give you practice and direction applying textbook methodologies to scripts so that you can rise to the challenge of individual assignments. Because so much in this course relies upon in-class work, absences and habitual lateness will adversely affect your course performance. Do **not** get in touch asking "for the assignment" or a "rundown of what you missed." My responsibilities as an instructor lie with the students who do come to class. The only exception is for excused absences, accompanied by appropriate legal, medical, or university documentation. Being in rehearsal, in shop, in tech, or in performance does **not** excuse or exempt anyone from their responsibilities to this course. Any unexcused absence will seriously undermine your success in this course.

## theatrical intimacy education online workshop

Students registered in all THA courses are required to attend the Theatrical Intimacy Education online workshop on September 12, from 1-6. The first part is just for students while the second part has students and faculty working together. TIE is the industry leader in creating best practices for keeping ourselves safe in terms of consent in the classroom and the rehearsal room and cultivating healthy environments and modes of communication — onstage, backstage, in rehearsal, and in class. Details will be forthcoming as we get closer to that date.

## class participation

Think of our meetings as potluck conversations and activities punctuated by informal lectures and discussions of the material. You should come to class *prepared to talk* about the reading for that day and work on individual/class projects in progress. Participation in a college-level course means careful, full preparation of the reading, frequent contributions to discussions, risk-taking in writing and thinking. You should come to each session armed with observations, opinions, questions, and insights, ready to take an active part in the ongoing dialogue about the course materials.

Coming to class and saying you are "frustrated" with the reading and thus have nothing to contribute is intellectually lazy and irresponsible. These plays and methods of script analysis are demanding but rewarding; while there will be

frustration with their complexity at times, this course understands that complexity as part of the challenge to which we aspire to rise during the semester.

You may not *like* this class or all of the readings we discuss — which is fine. You won't like everything you have to do in life to move forward. College is a time to develop the skills to learn what is required in a professional context and demonstrate to your professors that you grasp the course content. Don't come to class and sleep, check your phone, or otherwise distract others and disrupt the process. In short, you are expected to work actively to contribute to the class's overall movement and to strive to make the course a success. **I TAKE THIS SUBJECT VERY SERIOUSLY.**

## late papers

These are no fun for me to keep track of and only put you further behind. For each day beyond the scheduled due date, assignments will be penalized a third of a letter grade. **After a week, I will no longer accept the assignment, and it becomes a "O."** Again, if you become ill or the victim of emergency circumstances, please email me as soon as possible and stay in touch.

## cell phone and computer use

You may bring your computer to class with you, assuming that you use it in a scholarly and responsible fashion — accessing assignments sheets, course scripts, and your writing. This means that you will only have applications and windows related to the current discussion open. **You may not check** social media, surf the web, play games, or otherwise distract yourself and those around you from the class conversation with technological devices.

You are likewise expected to use cell phones in a responsible, respectful, and professional manner: **turn them off when you come in to class.** If you have an emergency for which you must be available, you must discuss it with me beforehand and keep your phone on vibrate. **Under no conditions are you allowed to** text message, take pictures or video (illegal in class), play games, or use the cell phone in any other manner during class. The nature of our academic endeavor together necessitates mutual respect and dedicated attention during the too short time we have together to undertake this work. Violators of this policy may be asked to leave the classroom.

## academic integrity

Any paper with your name on it signifies that you are the author—that the wording and major ideas are yours, with exceptions indicated by either quotation marks and/or citations. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use (appropriation and/or imitation) of others' materials (words and ideas). Evidence of plagiarism will result in one or more of the following: a failing grade for the assignment, an F in the course, and a report filed with the Student Standards Office.

## student success center

Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center ([www.eiu.edu/~success](http://www.eiu.edu/~success)) for assistance with time management, test taking, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581-6696, or go to 9<sup>th</sup> Street Hall, Room 1302.

## special needs accommodations

If you have a *documented* disability and are in need of academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible in order to receive approval.

## tech support

If you need assistance with D2L, call D2L Support toll free at 1-877-325-7778. Support is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Email and Chat options are also available on the "My Home" page after logging in to D2L. Other D2L resources including a D2L Orientation course for students are available on the same page. For technical questions regarding other software, hardware, network issues, EIU NetID/password, or Panthermail, contact the ITS Helpdesk at 217-581-4357 during regular business hours or submit a help ticket at <https://techsupport.eiu.edu/>. If you have a question regarding course content, contact your instructor.

# THA 2258: Script Analysis

Dr. Chris Wixson

## course calendar

**\*\*** Reading and writing assignments appear below on the day they are due. Please bring the appropriate texts to class **or** a device through which you can access them.

**\*\*** Because this schedule can and probably will change, it is imperative that you bring it to each class meeting **or** a device through which you can access it so as to make the appropriate revisions.

**\*\*** Both of our textbooks (Ball and Thomas) assume a working knowledge of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* for the purposes of illustration. If you have not read these plays, it is a good idea to do so as soon as possible.

August	25	Course Introduction / Beckett's "Breath" / Cangiullo's "Detonation Synthesis" (D2L)
	27	Susan Glaspell's "Trifles" (D2L) / <i>Backwards and Forwards</i> Part One <b>Mini-Analysis #1 Due on D2L by Friday 8/28 at 11:59 PM</b>
September	1	Reread "Trifles" / <i>Backwards and Forwards</i> Parts Two and Three Choose your Play / "Preparing your Script" / Individual Project Workshop
	3	Formalist Play Analysis / Read <i>Script Analysis</i> "Introduction" Discuss Upcoming Short Writing Assignments / Project Workshop <b>Open Dialogue Project Due on D2L by Friday 9/4 at 11:59 PM</b>
	8	Hellman's <i>The Little Foxes</i> / <i>Script Analysis</i> Chapter 1 (pp. 1-27 and 38-40) <i>Foxes</i> Analysis and Action Analysis
	10	Formalist Analysis / Review of Aristotelian Structure / Action Analysis Workshop
<b>*Saturday, September 12 from 1-6 is the <i>required</i> online Theatrical Intimacy Education online workshop, required for all students enrolled in THA courses. More details will be forthcoming.</b>		
	15	Bring Chosen Play to Class / Action Analysis Troubleshooting Workshop (Part Two)
	17	<b>Action Analysis Due</b>
	22	Reread <i>Foxes</i> / <i>Script Analysis</i> Chapter 2 (pp. 41-65) – Given Circumstances
	24	Bring Chosen Play to Class / Given Circumstances Workshop
	29	<i>Foxes</i> / <i>Script Analysis</i> Chapter 3 (pp. 73-92) – Background Story
October	1	<b>Given Circumstances / Background Story Analysis Due 11:59 PM Friday 10/2</b>

- 6 Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* / *Script Analysis* (pp.172-87) – Character
- 8 *The Piano Lesson* / *Script Analysis* (pp.172-87) – Character

\*No physical classroom sessions this week — just a Tuesday Zoom workshop and working on the Character Analysis and screening the film of *Piano Lesson*. In what ways does the film depart from the script? What clue does the final moment of the film reveal about the director's sense of the main character and conflict?

- 13 *The Piano Lesson*
- 15 *The Piano Lesson* / **Character Analysis Due**
- Screen Film Version: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgXmTMFzp3E>  
(Runs an hour and 40 minutes)

- 20 DeLappe's *The Wolves*
- 22 *The Wolves* / **Mini Analysis #2 Due**

- 27 Green's *Hang*
- 29 *Hang* / **Mini-Analysis #3 Due**

- November 3 NO CLASS SESSION — ELECTION DAY HOLIDAY
- 5 Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano* (D2L)  
*Script Analysis* (pp. 27-37; 65-72; 92-4; 196-8)
- 10 Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes*
- 12 Final Exam Workshop
- 17 TBA
- 19 **Full Formalist Analysis Assignment Due to D2L by 11/20 11:59 PM**

HAPPY THANKSGIVING BREAK!!!!

- December 1 Exam Workshop
- 3 Exam Workshop
- 8 Exam Workshop
- 10 Conclusion / Evaluation / Exam Preparation

**\*\*Final exam due (via D2L dropbox): Thursday, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 11:59 PM.**

For your three short and your formalist analyses, you may select from the following full-length modern and contemporary plays:

**\*\*PLEASE DO NOT SELECT A PLAY WITH WHICH YOU HAVE BEEN  
INVOLVED IN A PAST PRODUCTION OR WORKED ON IN THA 3800\*\***

Auburn, <i>Proof</i>	Rebeck, <i>Seminar</i>
Baker, <i>The Flick</i>	Ruhl, <i>In the Next Room</i>
Chekhov, <i>The Seagull</i>	Shaw, <i>Mrs. Warren's Profession</i>
Guirgis, <i>The Motherf**ker with the Hat</i>	Shepard, <i>Fool for Love</i>
Hall, <i>The Mountaintop</i>	Silverman, <i>The Moors</i>
Harmon, <i>Bad Jews</i>	Wilde, <i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i>
Hansberry, <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i>	Williams, <i>Cat on a Hot Tin Roof</i>
Ibsen, <i>A Doll's House, Hedda Gabler</i>	Wilson, <i>Joe Turner's Come and Gone</i>
Pinter, <i>The Birthday Party</i>	

**\*Hard copies of all of the above can be found at Booth Library.**

**\*Some can be accessed in pdf format online (do a Google search).**

**\*I have pdf copies of the Baker, Hall, Harmon, Hansberry, Rebeck, Shepard, Silverman, and Wilson.**